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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PBTS](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT ON INDEPENDENT SHIA CLERIC

REF: BAGHDAD 002243

CLASSIFIED BY: Ramon Negrón, Director, Regional Embassy Office
Basrah, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (c)

¶1. (C) Summary: Gunmen rumored to be connected to a Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) Special Group attempted to assassinate independent Shia cleric Sayid Aqiel Fadil Abbass Jamal al-Deen on July 16. The attack is one of a series of recent assassination attempts that underscore the fragile nature of Basrah's security gains and the threat posed by militants returning from Iran. End summary.

¶2. (C) Sayid Abdul Aaly al-Musawi, owner of the Al-Musawi Hospital in Basrah and a close REO contact, telephoned the REO on July 17 to report the attempted assassination of Sayid Aqiel Fadil Abbass Jamal al-Deen. According to Musawi, a group of men in an off-white sedan opened fire on Aqiel at about 0900 on July 16, as he was being chauffeured through the old quarter of Basrah. Aqiel is a politically-independent, nationalist, religious figure and Imam of a local mosque. He is also a member of the Al-`Ikbareah school, a traditional religious school headed by his uncle, Hadji Jamal al-Deen.

¶3. (C) REO poloff met with Deen's cousin and PC member Sayid Bah'a Jamal al-Deen on July 20 to discuss the incident. According to Bah'a, Aqiel was shot four times during the attack but remains in stable condition. Bah'a complained that traffic police at the intersection and soldiers in an army vehicle parked at the nearby mosque did not react. He did praise the 14th Division (IA) Commander Abd al-Aziz, whom Bah'a claimed was the only official following up on the incident.

¶4. (C) According to Musawi, the gunmen were rumored to be members of a JAM Special Group recently returned from Iran. Bah'a claimed that, according to his sources, between July 17 and 19 there had been 11 assassination attempts in Basrah. "Clearly," he said, "they're attempting to undermine the success of Charge of the Knights."

¶5. (S) Comment: Members of the Al-`Ikbareah school, Aqiel and Bah'a are both independent and openly anti-Iranian. While the gunmen's identity as members of a JAM Special Group cannot be confirmed, the possibility is consistent with intelligence reports and recent statements made by REO contacts, including Basrah Operations Commander LTG Mohammed Jawad Hewidi, that JAM members are returning to Basrah from Iran and planning new operations (reftel). The attack on Aqiel follows the assassination of ISCI representative Abu Ali al-Daraji by unknown gunmen earlier this month. Reporting suggests the representative was killed for criticizing the Sadr Trend. We are concerned that Sayid Bah'a Jamal al-Deen may be targeted in the future. The attacks underscore the fragile nature of Basrah's security gains and the threat posed by militants returning from Iran. End comment.

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